Grief Journal

Emotions: Writing Through a Loss With Worden's Four Tasks

A grief journal is a private place to write about the person you lost and how you are living with the loss. The prompts follow psychologist J. William Worden's four tasks of mourning, with one prompt for each of seven days. Worden says the tasks do not have to happen in a set order, and you may come back to each one many times, so you can skip ahead to whichever day fits.

A The four tasks of mourning

Task	What it can look like
Accept that the loss is real	Knowing, in your head and in your heart, that the person has died and will not come back.
Work through the pain	Letting yourself feel sadness, anger, guilt or longing, instead of pushing it away.
Adjust to life without them	Taking on new roles and routines, and rethinking who you are and what you believe.
Find a lasting connection	Keeping a place for the person in your life while you also go on living yours.

Why does this work? *For many years, experts thought healthy grieving meant letting go of the person who died. In 1996, researchers Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman described how many grieving people keep a bond with the person through memories, rituals and inner conversations, and argued that this can be a healthy part of grief. Worden's fourth task makes room for that bond.*

B How to use this journal

- Write one day at a time. The days do not have to be in a row, and it is fine to take a break between them.
- Each day has one prompt. If it feels like too much today, write about anything else that is on your mind.
- Write as much or as little as you like. A few words count.

Studies so far have not shown that writing makes grief pass faster. Think of this journal as a place to keep your thoughts and memories, and write when you want to, for as long as you want.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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1 Day 1: Accepting the loss

Date:

What do I remember about when I found out? What do I still find hard to believe?

2 Day 2: The pain

Date:

What feeling has been loudest this week, and when does it show up most?

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3 Day 3: The pain

Date:

What do I miss most about them today?

4 Day 4: Adjusting

Date:

What is different in my days now, and what has been hardest to get used to?

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5

Day 5: Adjusting

Date:

What has this loss changed in how I see myself or the world?

6

Day 6: Connection

Date:

What did they teach me that I still carry? How do I want to remember them on birthdays and anniversaries?

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7

Day 7: A letter to them

Date:

You can keep talking to the person you lost. Write them a letter about what you want them to know, or what has happened since they died.

Dear

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Looking back on the week

Which day was hardest to write, and which felt good to write?

What would I like to keep doing to remember them?

Grief has no set timeline. If grief makes it very hard to get through daily life, a grief counselor or therapist can help at any point. Grief that stays this intense for a year or more can be a sign of prolonged grief disorder, which can be treated. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988 in the US, or call your local emergency number.

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